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SUBJECT: SOUTH DARFUR HUMANITARIAN SITUATION STABLE, BUT  
UNSUSTAINABLE

REF: (A) KHARTOUM 908, (B) KHARTOUM 857, (C) KHARTOUM 856,  
(D) KHARTOUM 802, (E) KHARTOUM 746

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. During the week of August 10, USAID staff traveled to South Darfur to assess the humanitarian situation. Although the overall humanitarian situation is currently stable and emergency gaps are filled following the March 2009 expulsions of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), relief staff highlighted concerns regarding sustainability of the emergency response, deteriorating sanitation conditions, and the increased potential for disease outbreaks during the current rainy season. END SUMMARY.

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SOUTH DARFUR HUMANITARIAN SITUATION STABLE, BUT UNCERTAIN  
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¶2. (U) Between August 9 and 12, staff from USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) traveled to Nyala, South Darfur, to meet with UN agencies and implementing NGO partners regarding the humanitarian situation in South Darfur. During the four-day trip, USAID/OFDA staff met with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UN World Food Program (WFP), UN World Health Organization (WHO), UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), American Refugee Committee, Humedica, International Medical Corps, MC/Scotland, and Merlin.

¶3. (U) According to humanitarian partners, the South Darfur current humanitarian situation is characterized by annual agricultural season movements and temporary returns, and a push by the Sudanese government for permanent returns. USAID partners also noted a deteriorating environmental sanitation situation. In addition, emergency gaps stemming from the March NGO expulsions remain temporarily filled, but without long-term gap-filling mechanisms.

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FARMING SEASON FUELS SOUTH DARFUR POPULATION MOVEMENT  
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¶4. (U) As of mid-August, South Darfur is experiencing the annual increase in population movement associated with the planting season. According to UN reports, 2009 population movement rates are similar to movements in 2008. According to NGO and UN field staff, insecurity prevents permanent returns to some areas of origin, and populations may return to Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps

and IDP gathering areas once the agricultural season concludes. Although some individuals are leaving camps to farm land, UN staff reported that children and livestock remain at camps. (NOTE: IDPs may travel between camps and areas of origin for a significant period of time in order to assess the security situation. END NOTE.)

15. (U) South Darfur humanitarian staff reported ongoing efforts by the Sudanese government to convince relief agencies into supporting returns and providing assistance to GNU-identified returns areas. Highlighting GNU-identified returns areas, including Shattaia and Donkey Dereisa, FAO noted that the current residents are seasonal returnees or squatters occupying land that belongs to others. FAO also noted concern with the latter movement, particularly as customary Sudanese law states that an individual who does not return to his land for three years forfeits ownership. (NOTE: Sudanese government encouragement for other individuals to move onto and farm vacant IDP land may further aggravate land issues. END NOTE.)

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NON-TRADITIONAL DONORS ENCOURAGE RETURNS  
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16. (SBU) According to OCHA, non-traditional donors have recently arrived in South Darfur and are advocating for increased returns. Many of the organizations from Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (NOTE: including Red Crescent societies from both countries END NOTE), and the Arab League are returns-focused and do not coordinate with international NGOs or UN agencies that have been operating in Darfur for years. During one conversation with OCHA staff, Arab League representatives presented the issue of returns in Darfur as a

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"done deal," saying we will finance it." NGO staff also reported that the South Darfur HAC has announced plans for significant population returns in 2010. (NOTE: Humanitarian agencies remain concerned that some HAC-encouraged populations will be denied assistance if international organizations cannot verify that returns are voluntary and in line with international humanitarian principles. END NOTE.)

17. (SBU) According to OCHA, Sudanese NGOs are required to include assistance to returns in their organization's mission statement. Noting the Sudanese government's March 2009 effort to nationalize humanitarian aid within the year, OCHA questioned the ability of international organizations to target and deliver assistance to individuals in need when national NGO partners have to satisfy returns-focused missions. According to UN agencies, the partnership is further strained by limited national NGO resources and staffing, and poor feedback from populations receiving services from the local organizations.

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SECURITY STABILIZES, BUT FOR HOW LONG?  
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18. (SBU) According to OCHA, although overall security incidents against humanitarian staff and civilians have decreased, insecurity continues to be a problem, despite the decrease in the number of humanitarian staff in the area following the NGO expulsions and kidnappings. In response to a stabilized security situation in Nyala town, the UN Country Team has proposed changing Nyala town to UN Phase Three rather than UN Phase Four, while recommending that the rest of South Darfur remain at Phase Four.

19. (SBU) Although some humanitarian agencies have started providing services to rural areas in South Darfur, assailants continue to target relief staff traveling in the field, resulting in staff injury and loss of humanitarian assets and equipment. Following an August 4 carjacking in Limo village, approximately 23 km northeast of Kass town, one USAID/OFDA partner has suspended work in Limo and Tobufito villages, leaving the rural areas without health services. Humanitarian agencies in South Darfur continue to liaise with the UN to determine safe areas and investigate the possibility of traveling with armed escorts or in convoy in order to deliver humanitarian aid.

FOOD SECURITY REMAINS UNKNOWN BUT PROMISING

¶10. (U) According to FAO and WFP, the South Darfur food security situation will remain uncertain until the end of the rainy season. Although the current rains started later than usual, FAO and state agriculture officials hope that the rains continue through early October to support a robust harvest. The 2008 harvest resulted in a decrease in the South Darfur food gap, from a deficit of 425,000 metric tons (MT) in 2007 to 119,000 MT in 2008. Currently, FAO observes increased livestock prices, decreased access to market (due to insecurity and flooding), as well as elevated prices and decreased supply on the local seed market. In an effort to increase seed access and prevent farmers from consuming seed, FAO and implementing partners have initiated robust seed protection programs and coordinated with WFP to provide a general food distribution for five food-insecure localities.

GAPS FILLED, BUT EFFORTS UNSUSTAINABLE

¶11. (SBU) South Darfur humanitarian staff noted that the state has pre-expulsion gaps, post-expulsion gaps, and security-related humanitarian gaps. Sudanese officials, UN agencies, and humanitarian organizations have filled many of the post-expulsion gaps, but gaps remain in rural areas, according to the UN and NGOs. Five months after the March 2009 NGO expulsions, UN agencies continue to provide significant support to state ministry gap-filling efforts, putting additional strain on the stretched UN system and reducing UN availability for program oversight and

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emergency planning. (NOTE: Typically, UN agencies provide implementing NGO partners with program oversight, coordination, and support rather than direct operational capacity. END NOTE.) Additionally, the NGO expulsions significantly reduced partner capacity to provide technical assistance, and remaining international NGOs do not have the technical capacity or experience to support specialized nutrition and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programs, according to UNICEF.

-- Nutrition: International and local UNICEF staff continue to work to address the nutrition needs of the South Darfur population. In response to the annual hunger gap period, UNICEF provides direct support to 1,700 supplementary feeding center patients in South Darfur, an increase from the 2008 caseload. UNICEF staff noted a willingness to provide interim assistance, but that a sustainable solution must come from the government ministries which remain severely understaffed and overburdened.

-- WASH: Although the Government of National Unity (GNU) Office of Water and Environmental Sanitation (WES) continues to work to fill WASH gaps, UNICEF staff noted that GNU WES remains focused on water access rather than sanitation and waste management. Currently IDP camps have adequate water access; however, environmental sanitation has deteriorated significantly, and UNICEF noted concern for potential outbreaks if the situation remains unaddressed. In addition, UNICEF staff reported that GNU WES does not have the capacity, camp experience, or monitoring ability to handle the current situation, and remains unable to expand staff to address increased needs during the rainy season.

-- Health: According to WHO, the current low-level of health services and deteriorating environmental sanitation increase the state's vulnerability to disease outbreaks. Although Sudanese officials report that the health gap is 100 percent filled, the capacity and quality of health staff, types and quality of health services have declined significantly since March and remaining organizations are unable to address the caseload in the long term, according to WHO. Although the Ministry of Health (MoH) has provided assistance in some areas previously served by expelled NGOs, WHO reported that MoH staff lack appropriate medications, coordination, and supervision to replace expelled international

partners.

-- Livelihoods: The March NGO expulsions removed nearly all USAID/OFDA-funded livelihoods programs from South Darfur, including community centers, fuel-efficient stoves, farmer trainings, and seed distributions. Following the March expulsions, FAO and other organizations worked to fill the livelihoods gap of 160,617 households left by suspended and expelled NGOs; however, remaining organizations have served only 56,759 households, leaving a gap of more than 100,000 households to be covered by the Ministry of Agriculture. In addition, several NGOs are conducting assessments to determine the possibility of providing livelihoods activities to South Darfur IDPs before the end of the year.

¶12. (SBU) COMMENT. During the last five years, relief staff have observed seasonal returns in Darfur during the planting season. With the arrival of the November harvest season, Darfur typically experiences an increase in violence, banditry, and attacks on farmers harvesting seasonal crops. As the 2009 harvest season approaches, it is in the interest of the Sudanese government and international donors to work to mitigate the seasonal spike in violence and protect civilian populations throughout Darfur. Possible efforts could include encouraging community dialogue between different ethnic groups, requesting additional UN patrols in agricultural areas, and liaising with armed opposition groups to encourage a reduction of violent attacks. Such confidence-building measures may potentially have longer-term impacts of increasing food security in Darfur and taking a step to affirming civilian safety outside of IDP camps and IDP gathering areas.

¶13. (SBU) The current stability of the South Darfur humanitarian situation is a credit to international donors and humanitarian agencies. Humanitarian staff noted; however, that present measures are not sustainable and the situation requires vigilant attention to develop long-term solutions and respond to any interim emergencies.

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END COMMENT.

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